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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1773  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 001047

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S RECEPTION IN HONOR OF POLITICAL  
PRISONERS

REF: MINSK 1018

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

#### Summary

1. (C) Ambassador hosted her second annual holiday reception for former political prisoners and the family and friends of currently jailed opposition activists. In the wake of the December 3-8 visit to Washington of a senior Belarusian opposition group, attendees expressed their appreciation of continued U.S. support for democracy in Belarus. Social democrat Igor Rynkevich presented Ambassador with a memorandum announcing the establishment of a "Belarus to Europe!" campaign to move Belarus towards EU membership, and calling for continued support from the U.S. and EU in promoting free and fair elections. End summary.

#### Intimidating Atmosphere and Unreasonable Prison Conditions

2. (C) On December 13, Ambassador hosted a reception for former political prisoners and the families of current prisoners of conscience at the EMR. This reception was the second holiday event held in honor of political prisoners. Tatyana Klimova described to Emboffs the dangerous conditions at the prison where her husband, former opposition MP and independent political analyst Andrey Klimov, is held. According to her account, Klimov lives in a barracks with almost 200 inmates in cold and overcrowded conditions. Theft and assault are common and there have been a number of inmate murders at the facility. Klimov has expressed fear for his safety since guards are unable or unwilling to control inmates and confiscate makeshift weapons found on prisoners. Klimova is permitted to visit her husband only twice a year at the prison in Mozyr, several hours from Minsk. She has requested that the Embassy continue its attempts to visit Klimov. Authorities have denied Klimova's requests to have her husband moved closer to the capital.

#### Election Monitoring Difficulties

3. (C) Former political prisoner Nikolay Astreiko, Chairman of the election monitoring NGO "Partnership", told Emboffs that he has discussed with his colleagues tentative plans to monitor the upcoming parliamentary elections. He acknowledged that it will be difficult to recruit and train election monitors who realize that they would likely be subject to severe repression by the regime. In addition, he stated that many trained observers feel they have already clearly documented manifold instances of fraud and that

further monitoring would be pointless. Astreiko himself is still serving a khimya (work release) sentence, and will refrain from making specific monitoring plans until he has served his complete term, which ends this spring.

#### Business Leaders Speak

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14. (C) Several attendees expressed appreciation for the recent visit of prominent Belarusian activists with President Bush and Secretary Rice in Washington. Enira Bronitskaya, who was a member of the delegation, attended the event and repeated her thanks to the USG for being included. Mikhail Marinich, former Deputy Foreign Minister and President of the pro-entrepreneur group Business Initiative was particularly effusive in his praise of the delegation's visit, and expressed hope that receiving such a high level of attention will encourage the opposition to pull together and gain momentum. He noted that trade with the Baltic countries is increasing, but that Lukashenko's anti-entrepreneur policies have hampered the speed of that growth. (Comment: Marinich's enthusiasm is important; he was potentially a participant in a similar delegation earlier in 2007 but did not travel when opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich refused to take part. Marinich clearly feels no ill will towards us over Milinkevich's misstep. End comment.) Valeriy Levonevskiy, the President of the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs expressed the hope that the USG will increase its attention on the entrepreneurs' movement.

#### Memorandum To Ambassador

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15. (SBU) At the beginning of the reception, Deputy Chair of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party "Gramada" Igor Rynkevich presented a memorandum to Ambassador announcing the establishment of the "Belarus to Europe!" campaign. The memorandum described the goals of the campaign, which are to push for compliance with the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership eligibility, and to promote fair elections. Specifically, the group urges the UN Security Council to examine the issue of national security and sovereignty of Belarus, especially in relation to Russia; calls upon the Council of Europe to demand the release of all political prisoners and to secure access for Belarusian citizens to the European Court of Human Rights; and encourages the EU to help Belarus implement the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. The document also encourages the world community to demand improved election laws, including a return of authority to the Parliament, inclusion of opposition representatives in electoral commissions, granting the opposition access to state media, and making electoral laws consistent with international standards. The document was signed by the coordinators of the campaign: Rynkevich, Irina Kozulina, the wife of jailed presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, Igor Lednik, Vyacheslav Sivchik, Yuri Karetnikov, and Pavel Krasovsky. Dmitry Fedaruk, acting head of Malady Front was also to have signed, but was unable to do so because of his hospitalization which resulted from an assault by police during a peaceful demonstration the night before (reftel). (Note: Post will email Embassy translation of memorandum to EUR/UMB. End note.)

#### Comment

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16. (C) As we have experienced ever since we started hosting events like this in late 2006, former political prisoners and their families expressed genuine gratitude for the USG's continued support of their fight for democracy in Belarus. These events presented an opportunity for them to discuss their views not only with Embassy personnel, but also with other activists whom they seldom have a chance to meet. We

continue our efforts to support political prisoners; we are attending several trials (reported septel) and have also renewed requests -- unlikely to be granted -- to visit Kozulin and Klimov in prison.

STEWART